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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7580
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 3102
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 1196
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3414
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5807
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4796
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3575

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 001607

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: NEW CABINET SWORN IN

REF: A. RABAT 1601

1B. RABAT 1599 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On the afternoon of October 15, King Mohammed VI swore in the cabinet assembled by new Prime Minister Abbas El-Fassi. As predicted ref A, Taieb Fassi Fihri is Morocco's new Foreign Minister. The other "sovereign" ministries - Defense, Interior, and Islamic Affairs, remain in tact from the previous cabinet. (See para 4 for an annotated listing of the new cabinet.) These and other positions in the new cabinet are occupied by individuals well and favorably known to the USG. In our initial count, seven of the 33 new Ministers are alumnae of the International Visitor Program. End summary.

12. (C) The new cabinet, which has been reduced from 34 to 33 portfolios, contains seven women, up from four in the previous government. The new cabinet is a mixture of representatives from four political parties (royalist parties Istiqlal ("independence") and the National Rally of Independents (RNI), along with the leftist Union of Socialist Popular Forces (USFP) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)) and non-partisan technocrats. The Mouvement Populaire (MP), the Berber-influenced party which had also been expected to join the coalition, has instead moved to the opposition after rejecting the cabinet slots Fassi had been offering them.

13. (C) Without the MP's 41 seats, Fassi's governing coalition is in a minority - with only 146 of 325 total seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, royal confidante and former Deputy Interior Minister Fouad Ali El-Himma, who successfully ran for a seat in the new Parliament last month, has formed a new bloc of small parties comprising approximately 30 seats. (This was largely at the expense of the Union Constitutionnelle, whose caucus has shrunk from 27 to ten seats.) Himma has pledged that the new small-party caucus he leads will support Fassi's government, without formally participating, an arrangement that has several precedents in modern Morocco's political history. This development will support speculation that Himma was tasked by the Palace to move into the Parliament to change its dynamic from within.

14. (C) A partially annotated listing of the new cabinet follows:

Prime Minister: Abbas El-Fassi: Party chief of the Istiqlal, which took the most seats in the September elections;

Minister of State without Portfolio: Mohammed El-Yazghi. Chief of the USFP, Yazghi served in the previous cabinet as Minister of Water and Territorial Development. He is unpopular among many in his own party for his autocratic management style. He is an IV program alumnus;

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Taieb Fassi Fihri (TFF). TFF, often seen in the last government as the "defacto" Foreign Minister, has been promoted to the official title. See ref A for bio information and commentary;

Minister of Justice: Abdelwahed Radi. A senior USFP member, Radi was speaker of the previous parliament. Like USFP colleague Yazghi, Radi is seen a symbol of the party's sclerotic leadership. He is an IV program alumnus;

Minister of Interior: Chakib Benmoussa. Returning to the same job, Benmoussa is an urbane MIT graduate who gained a reputation for competence and keeping cool under pressure in the previous government. He has no partisan affiliation;

Minister of Islamic Affairs: Ahmed Toufiq. Returning to the same job, Toufiq is known for his pragmatic efforts to counter extremism through the promotion of moderate Islamic discourse in Morocco. No partisan affiliation;

Minister of Economy and Finance: Salaheddine Mezouar. An RNI activist, he served in the previous government as Minister of Industry;

Minister of Health: Yasmina Baddou. One of the "stars" of the Istiqlal Party, she served as social affairs minister in the previous government;

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Minister of Agriculture: Aziz Akhenouch. A prominent Agadir businessman and community leader known for close ties to the Palace. His party affiliation is not known;

Minister of Housing: Ahmed Toufiq Hejira. Returning to the cabinet in the same job, Hejira is one of Istiqlal's most popular "young" leaders;

Minister of Transport: Karim Ghellab. Returning to the cabinet in the same job, Ghellab is another of Istiqlal's most talented and relatively young leaders;

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs: Mohammed Saad Alami. Returning to the cabinet in the same job, Alami is a life-long Istiqlal member, and also mayor of Chefchaouen, a tourist destination in the mountains of Northern Morocco. He is an IV program alumnus;

Minister of Energy, Mines, Water, and Environment: Amina Benkhadra. An RNI figure, she has previous experience in the Ministry of Energy and mines (now combined with water and environment);

Secretary-General of the Government: Abdessadek Rabii. A

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veteran who has held this post for several terms, Rabii is charged with certifying the constitutionality of laws passed by parliament;

Minister of Education: Ahmed Akhchichine. A former Secretary-General of the Higher Audio-Visual Council (roughly

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analogous to the FCC), he has no known partisan affiliation;

Minister of Communication and Government Spokesman: Khalid Naciri. From the leftist PPS, Naciri is an IV program alumnus;

Minister of Tourism: Mohammed Boussaid. An RNI activist, Boussaid is known for specializing in privatization initiatives in the previous government. He is an IV program alumnus;

Minister of Social Development, Family, and Solidarity: Nouzha Skalli. A Casablančan pharmacist and former MP from the leftist PPS, she is a prominent feminist;

Minister of Youth and Sport: Nawal El Moutawakil. A gold medalist from the 1984 olympics, she held the same Ministerial post in the mid-1990s.

Minister of Culture: Touriya Jabrane. A well known actress, she is from the USFP;

Minister of Employment and Professional Training: Jamal Aghmani;

Minister of Industry, Commerce, and New Technologies: Ahmed Chami, from the USFP;

Minister of Foreign Trade: Abdelatif Maazoz;

Minister Delegate for Defense: Abderrahmane Sbair. Returning to the cabinet in the same post, Sbair handles administrative rather than policy matters. The King serves as his own Defense Minister;

Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister for Economic and General Affairs: Nizar Baraka. He is a senior Istiqlal Party member and confidante of PM Fassi;

Minister Delegate for Public Sector Modernization: Mohammed Abbou. His drawn from the RNI;

Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister for Moroccan Expatriate Affairs: Mohammed Ameer. A USFP nominee;

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Energy, Mines, Water,

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and Environment: Abdelkebir Zahoud. An Istiqlal activist, he returns to the cabinet in the same job;

Secretary of State for Tourism and Handicrafts: Anis Birou.

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An RNI member, Birou held the same level post in the Ministry of Education in the previous government;

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Interior: Saad Hassar.

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He is an MOI veteran with no known partisan affiliation;

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Secretary of State for the Ministry of Education: Latifa

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Labibda. Party affiliation not known;

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Ahmed

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Lakhrif. Party affiliation not known;

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

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Latifa Akherbach. Party affiliation not known;

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing: Abdeslam

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Al-Mesbahi. Party affiliation not known;

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